The Exposition of Artistic Research: Publishing Art in Academia

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Introduction

By Michael Schwab & Henk Borgdorff

Over the last two decades, the relationship between art and academia – under the heading of 'artistic research' – has been widely discussed. The border between these two domains, constantly renegotiated and transgressed, remains unstable and contested. Although art now contributes to academic knowledge, and academia in turn offers forms of knowledge that may be interwoven with or based on art practices, their relationship is far from settled.[1] Because of the need for a constant renegotiation, one might say that 'artistic research is an activity for border-crossers' (Dombois et al. 2012: 11), who, while violating boundaries, create new relationships and knowledges. Lacking established languages and disciplinary frameworks for the multiplicity of possible crossings, it seems that each and every artistic proposition needs to have the capacity to 'expose' itself as research in order to create a link to academia. The contributions in this volume address, from different perspectives, the consequences of this relationship between art and academia for the publishing of art as research, as well as looking at how artists have been engaging with publishing in order to make epistemic claims.

As a new term with a comparatively short history, 'artistic research' may signal a shift in the practice of art. However, it is one that many commentators do not perceive or value.[2] Indeed, before art academies reinvented themselves as research institutes and, as a consequence, began to advertise and fund artistic practice as research, the notion did not have much currency either in the art world or the world at large. It may thus be speculated that 'artistic research', rather than defining practice, simply announces the arrival of the art academy into academia. This is seen by some (Cf. Sheik 2006; Busch 2011) as the integration of art into the 'knowledge economy', threatening the autonomy of both art and the academy. In Europe, for example, discussions around 'artistic research' coincided with the development of what is known as the 'Bologna Process', which attempts to implement a particular educational model that is striated into bachelor, master and doctoral programmes within the European

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1. Cf. Borgdorff (2012, pp. 56-73) for a discussion of the uneasy relationship between artistic research and academia.

2. For example, Elkins (2009, p. 148) suggests that 'artistic research' may be detrimental to artistic practice.

Higher Education Area (EHEA). Using a notion such as 'artistic research' may thus express compliance with a contested development.

There is, however, another way of looking at it. If we were to accept that historically art has always been an epistemic activity that has never required a notion such as 'artistic research' nor institutes of higher education for its existence, we might accept that art is already part of 'knowledge society'.[3] If this is the case, the focus should be placed not on establishing the epistemic qualities of art, but on the way in which those qualities can be made known, in particular in the context of academia, where other epistemic practices, most importantly the sciences, have a longer history. The danger is that as the art academy enters academia, art may be subjected to epistemic regimes that are not suitable to, and thus might compromise, the kinds of practices and knowledges in which artists engage.

In the short history of artistic research in academia, a fixed framework has in most cases been enforced, requiring an artistic as well as a written component that together form a proposition. To take one example in the UK, the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) 'expect[s] … practice to be accompanied by some form of documentation of the research process, as well as some form of textual analysis or explanation to support its position and to demonstrate critical reflection', stating that without such support artists 'would be ineligible for funding from the Council' (AHRC 2009: 59). How are we to understand statements such as this?

If one of the two components – artistic or written – were missing, research could still be proposed, but it would either be outside of academia (as 'art') or it would be research of a different, non-artistic type. Implicit in this arrangement of two components is academia's fear of having to assess work without the props that would help evaluate its epistemic relevance or provide a language to discuss and defend what such relevance may be. In this case, art would need to be judged in the way it is weighed up in art competitions, where the view of the jury is final, disagreement is pointless, and the jury refuses to discuss and defend its decisions. In an academic context, not to have the right to understand or contest a judgement contradicts all ideals of impartiality and fairness. Thus in academia, beyond the simple presentation of art, discourse needs to be entered into.[4]

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3. 'Knowledge society' is a much wider term than 'knowledge economy'. Following the 2005 UNESCO World Report 'Towards Knowledge Societies', there are different types of knowledges, only some of which are deemed useful for the 'knowledge economy'. The term 'knowledge economy' describes 'a particular knowledge-driven stage of capitalist development' (UNESCO 2005, p. 46), which fuels a 'knowledge divide' both in terms of skills and access and also in terms of the value placed on different types of knowledges (UNESCO 2005, p. 22).

4. Traditionally, art criticism has provided discursivity in art. A possible role of art criticism for artistic research requires further investigation.

However, the double construct of art and writing that in most cases justifies art's entry into academia does not simply require discursivity, since an argument could be made that all art counts as discourse. This explains the use of words such as 'explanation', 'support' and 'demonstration' in the above-quoted example from the AHRC: all these terms suggest that one must defend one's artistic proposition as research.[5] It is thus not a question of ontology – is art research? – but a question of epistemology – how do we know that a certain practice is research?

Here, we are faced with a problem, since if art does not already offer its own demonstration or explanation 'to support its position and to demonstrate critical reflection' – in short, its own discourse that confers its meaning – then anything that is said in relation to it through this supplementary piece of writing might be without ground. However, this fundamental epistemological problem, which we believe handicaps artistic researchers, who are asked to deliver artistic claims through academic writing without reliable epistemologies that connect such writing with their art, seems not to affect the current pragmatics of academia.

In some countries and regions – usually where artistic research is already incorporated into the research infrastructure – people no longer seem to see the need to convince academia of the validity of practice-based research in the arts or to engage the art world in the relevance of research; in many others, however, the feeling of unease and tension is still manifest. In Germany, for example, the German Research Foundation (DFG) was called upon to support arts-based research.[6] However, to date it is reluctant to do so, since it cannot provide a fit with the conventional criteria for the conduct of academic research. Other funding agencies in Germany, such as the Ernst Schering Foundation and the Volkswagen Foundation, are more open to experimentation with the boundaries of academia and are seriously considering funding projects where art and writing are intertwined. The Berlin University of the Arts does not acknowledge advanced art practice as research at the doctoral level,[7] while in some other German higher education institutes (e.g. in Hamburg and Weimar), doctoral programmes in the creative and performing arts have been established. In Sweden, a new artistic doctorate was introduced in 2010 that foregrounds the artistic component of the research proposition. However, it is unclear to many how that component relates to or coheres with the written component, the documentation.[8] In Austria, a new funding scheme,

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5. Schwab (2008) compares this construct to the possible defence of art as described in Book X of Plato's Republic.

6. See http://www.hkw.de/media/en/texte/pdf/2012_1/programm_5/thesenpapier_kuenstlerische_forschung.pdf (accessed 29-11-2012).

7. http://gs.udk-berlin.de/ (accessed 29-11-2012).

8. http://www.konstnarligaforskarskolan.se (accessed 29-11-2012).

the Programme for Art-based Research (PEEK), was introduced.[9] Although it is furnished by the Austrian Science Fund (FWF), by avoiding the German term *Forschung* (research) in its programme description, it displays scepticism towards its academic validity. And in the Netherlands – where so far no third cycle in higher arts education exists – arts-based projects in higher education are only eligible for funding when they address societal needs and contribute to social welfare and economic growth. This instrumental view of research in the arts, under the label of 'validation', does not leave much room for a more nuanced understanding of the relationship between art and academia. Meanwhile, research on art and design practice-based PhDs (Hockey 2007) has shown that the tension between art and writing is one of the central problems experienced by both students and their supervisors in the degree programmes. This unease is persistent even where degree programmes have been in place for more than fifteen years, as in the UK, Australia or Scandinavia. This points to a more fundamental problem.

A fresh approach

This book attempts to question the still-dominant distribution of research between art ('practice') and writing ('theory') and to lay new foundations for a more considered approach. In order to explain its context, it is important to stress the international and networked activities around the *Journal for Artistic Research* (*JAR*), the Society for Artistic Research (SAR) and the Artistic Research Catalogue (ARC) project.[10] These connected initiatives neither operate within a singular national framework, nor are they bound to the limits of academic institutions. This allows for a wider perspective on academia and a degree of flexibility that would otherwise not be possible, in particular since they engage in a pragmatic, bottom-up approach that aims to demonstrate new possibilities for the academic publication of artistic research. However, rather than reiterating *JAR*'s position, which is discussed both in its editorials[11] and in Schwab (2012a; 2012b), in this book we wish to trace responses and possible connections in the wider field.

Due to this flexibility, it has become possible to suspend assumed or existing definitions of 'art' and 'writing' and instead engage in what may be called an experiment set up to create new orientations for artistic research practice. In this experiment, the overriding concern lies with the types of practices and knowledges (and their interrelationships) that may emerge as publications of artistic research before a particular purpose is inscribed that may narrow outcomes. More specifically, the experiment to which we refer raises the distinct

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9. http://www.fwf.ac.at/en/projects/peek.html (accessed 29-11-2012).

10. Borgdorff (2012, chap. 11) describes the genesis of these initiatives.

11. http://www.jar-online.net/ (accessed 07-10-2013).

possibility that if space is to be provided for fundamentally artistic processes in academia, then academia may need to be critiqued and transformed. This is also the reason why this book is firmly rooted in artistic concerns, while further publications will need to address in more detail possible consequences for academia.

Art is not the only field that calls for change from academia. What has been summarised as 'mode 2 knowledge production' (Gibbons et al. 1994; Nowotny et al. 2001) can be seen as a corrective to the standard model of scientific research that has dominated all research policies in the twentieth century. In contrast to 'mode 1 science', 'mode 2 knowledge production' takes place in the 'context of application'. It is interdisciplinary or transdisciplinary, involving both academics and other parties. Its research is localised in heterogeneous, diversified, often transitory configurations made up of universities, governmental agencies, third-party organisations and other actors that assemble around a particular set of issues. And – importantly in the context of this volume – the research is assessed by an extended peer group in which the voices of those who do not traditionally belong to academia are incorporated. On a theoretical level, this transformation of academia parallels a broader understanding of 'research' that allows for non-discursive knowledge forms, unconventional research methods and enhanced means of documentation and presentation, as witnessed by developments in areas such as visual anthropology and cultural studies that are increasingly acknowledged by national and international research councils and funding agencies.[12]

In this general transformation of academia, art may be the most extreme case to date, and perhaps offers the most radical challenge due to its association with 'autonomy' (going back to Kant) or 'negativity' (Adorno). Although Romantic definitions of art that stem from the nineteenth century have been withering, art remains connected with notions of 'resistance', in particular regarding what has been called its 'academization' (Cf. Steyerl 2010; Busch 2011). Rather than suggesting that such positions are outdated and that the conflict between art and academia has either diminished or has disappeared into some form or 'third culture' (Snow 1998), it seems more appropriate to accept that they persist because they defend a set of values that is important to practitioners of art.

Without speculating on what exactly 'art' is, it may be sufficient for the purpose of this introduction to state two of these values that we believe underpin most of today's art education:

1.   Art is self-determined and suffers when it is told what to do.
2.   Art challenges existing forms of practice.

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12. Recently, the European Research Council has acknowledged artistic research as eligible for funding. Cf. the statement of its president, Helga Nowotny, in Biggs and Karlsson (2011, p. xxii).

From these assumptions, a number of conclusions can be drawn, which appear in varying degrees in the literature on 'artistic research'. For example, despite talk of 'discipline formation', there seems to be continued doubt regarding the possibility of providing a definition of 'discipline' that could be used for the regulation of artistic research.[13] A notion such as 'transdisciplinarity' seems to offer a way out, since it proposes a relationship both to disciplinarity and to its transgression (Mittelstraß 2000; Borgdorff 2012: 235f.). Likewise, it remains questionable whether artistic research applies methods like other fields of study (Slager 2009; Boomgaard 2011), or whether its ability to break with accepted methodologies and to facilitate paradigm shifts is not one of its key powers (Feyerabend 1990). It seems that whatever we think art is, we have to allow for the possibility that something else, while still remaining art, will come along that breaks with all such understandings. In fact, it may be questionable whether our Western definition of art even allows us to accept something as art that does not surprise us by extending the possibilities of what art might be.[14]

The lack of disciplinary frameworks puts some strain on key academic processes, such as peer review, which in their criteria make reference, for example, to existing disciplines, fields of study and methods. If, as suggested, art may transgress any criterion for its evaluation, since it transforms the ground on which the evaluation takes place, a practical solution needs to be found that allows for academic evaluation processes and peer-review without fixed points of reference. The fact that academic processes of evaluation are challenged does not, however, signal the fact that artistic research may not fit into broad definitions of research, as employed, for example, by the current Research Excellence Framework (REF) in the UK, which defines research as 'a process of investigation leading to new insights, effectively shared'.[15]

In order to explain those essential aspects of artistic research that cannot be governed by disciplinary or methodological frameworks, reference is often made to experiential, embodied or material dimensions (Cf. Carter 2004; Pakes 2004). Linked with these are notions of situatedness, transformation and difference that contradict a possible transparency, universality and objectivity of knowledge and which suggest a fundamental openness of art and meaning.

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13. The question of 'discipline' is an ongoing concern. Most recently, for example, the dOCUMENTA(13) conference 'On Artistic Research' asked: 'What do we mean by "artistic research"? Is research a discipline in its own right?' http://d13.documenta. de/#programs/the-kassel-programs/congresses-lectures-seminars/on-artisticr2 (accessed 04-11-2013).

14. The same has been said about 'knowledge': 'You won't, for example, tell us, nor could you possibly tell us, what the criteria are by which we know which uses of "know" in the future will be legitimate' (Putnam 1995, p. 32).

15. http://www.ref.ac.uk/pubs/2011-02/ (accessed 07-10-2013).

However, in a more radical understanding, this openness may need to include the questioning of any fixture, whether it is 'art', 'the body' or 'material' that is meant to provide an origin to knowledge, since those fixtures may be the outcomes of particular epistemic regimes that have inscribed them *as origin*. A perspective onto artistic research through deconstructive approaches (Schwab 2009; Öberg 2010) supports the idea that attention needs to be paid to how knowledge is constructed and proposed, which in turn requires one to question whether the 'written component' in fact represents the sole site of writing.

The distribution of research between art and writing might also be considered from the perspective of Science and Technology Studies, which acknowledge that between the world and our understanding of it transformations take place that constitute both world and understanding. This dynamic condition of research tells us that in our understanding of the world, understanding is already presupposed and at work, and that in our understanding of understanding, world is already presupposed and at work. Latour's notion of 'constructivist realism' (Latour 1999: 135) captures this interdependence of world and understanding, which – transposed to art and writing – underscores the idea that in all art practice a form of writing is at work.

The exposition of practice as research

With the notion of 'exposition', we wish to suggest an operator *between* art and writing. Although 'exposition' seems to comply with traditional metaphors of vision and illumination, it should not be taken to suggest the external exposure of practice to the light of rationality; rather, it is meant as the re-doubling of practice in order to artistically move from artistic ideas to epistemic claims. As suggested elsewhere (Schwab 2012b), depending on the practice in which one is actually engaged, constructs such as 'to perform practice as research', 'to stage practice as research', 'to curate practice as research', etc., are all equally suitable. Through such re-doubling, artistic practice is able to install a reflective distance within itself that allows it to be simultaneously the subject and the object of an enquiry. In this way, practice can deliver in one proposition both a thought and its appraisal.

As is illustrated by the many examples – past and present – that are mentioned in this book, artistic practice is already very much engaged in such reflective structures, and a notion such as 'artistic research' is not necessary to trace its operation. At the same time, an investigation into the various modes that can deliver varying degrees of reflexivity and the development of an awareness of those modes seems important. Moreover, the distinct possibility exists that reflexivity may be engaged along other, potentially non-epistemic dimensions, such as ethics or aesthetics, which in addition complicates the appreciation of any one example. In fact, it might be fair to say that pure forms of artistic research may not exist. However this may be, it is clear to us that much more

work needs to be done to better understand what it means to expose practice as research; this book may offer a few hints into possible avenues for investigation.

As discussed above, existing institutional frameworks for artistic research fundamentally operate according to the same principle, since art is also put forward and appraised. Here, however, a second practice – that of academic writing – is required, which artists are usually unable to negotiate as part of their practice, since it is determined by academic standards that are difficult to challenge in any one publication. If, as part of the suggested re-doubling, what is expected of writing is actually carried out as a component of practice, the need for additional academic texts may vanish, or, more provocatively put, we may open our eyes to modes of 'academic writing' that produce hybrid texts, or even no texts at all. Debates around the publication of artistic research may thus contribute to the wider developments in the field of enhanced publication, where, likewise, non-textual and often interactive elements are used to facilitate particular types of communication.

In order to support a workable model for 'the exposition of practice as research', two arguments need to be won. The first is to prove that writing (or 'theory') can be exercised in artistic practice that may not produce text. Assuming a positive answer to this, as a second step it needs to be argued that this writing can actually be conceived of as academic so as to facilitate exchange with other research cultures in academia. While the first part requires attention to artistic practice and reference to art theory, the second part requires a critique of academic standards of writing and a demonstration that more complex models can practically be managed in editorial processes and peer-review. Needless to say, with this book, we can only offer potential inroads into this wide and complex field.

Regarding the first argument, it is possible to trace how notions of 'exposition' have emerged from debates around artistic research. Although earlier publications such as Graeme Sullivan's *Art Practice as Research: Inquiry in the Visual Arts* (2005) carry the construct 'as research' in their titles, it is in particular *Thinking Through Art: Reflections on Art as Research* (2006) by Katy Macleod and Lin Holdridge that makes its relevance clear. Two aspects in the book's introduction deserve particular attention. The first is the 'as', or rather the 'counting as', that the authors take from a catalogue essay by Stephen Melville (2001). In it, Melville makes the point that a painting is not simply a painting, but rather, a work that counts as painting, and that, moreover, the counting may be done by the work itself insofar as 'matter thinks' (Melville 2001: 6).[16] The second aspect is the suggestion made by Macleod and Holdridge that such thinking matter may be related to the writing practice of 'artist scholars', and that 'we need to bring our writing nearer to our making' (Macleod and Holdridge 2006: 12).

However, while both Melville and Macleod and Holdridge suggest thought in art, they fall short of calling it writing. Melville contrasts the works

on show with the texts in the catalogue, which 'explore in the most general terms the conceptual apparatus we take to be entailed by the work itself' (Melville 2001: 2), thus seeming to define the works on show as art rather than writing. Likewise, Macleod and Holdridge suggest that we take inspiration from the *writing* of artist scholars in order to 'build an appropriate vigorous research culture' (Macleod and Holdridge 2006: 12) without questioning whether making and writing may actually be one and the same activity to those artist scholars when they produce academic texts. However, if the distribution of research across predefined components (art and writing) is to be challenged, this is precisely what is at stake, so as not to contradict the first assumption made above – art is self-determined – and not to limit *artistic* ownership of the proposition as a whole.

Just as Melville sees a painting as a work that counts as painting, it must be possible for a work to count as research. As suggested above, 'counting as' is ingrained in material practice that, depending on how it counts, can be perceived as either painting or research (or any other form as which it counts). What a work is supposed to count as is as important in the overall artistic proposition as what the work is. When practice counts as research, however, a simple description of that practice as 'thinking' is not sufficient, since a number of specific activities are associated with 'research' and usually require a researcher to engage with academic writing, since otherwise the work may not count successfully as research. This can again be illustrated using Melville's example of painting: if a work does not engage with what we may expect from 'painting' it may be difficult for the work to count as such. In other words, artistic practice that strives to count as research needs to engage in notions of research and academic writing.

Although criteria for the identification of research differ in detail from discipline to discipline, there is a broad degree of agreement as to what should be understood by research. It often begins with questions or issues that are relevant in the research context (academic and/or societal), and it employs methods that are appropriate to the research and which ensure the validity and reliability of the research findings. From this generic description of what research is, the criteria for the assessment of research can be distilled. These pertain to the research questions, the methods, the contexts and the outcomes of the research. One may ask of every study to communicate what it is about,

16. Melville references a number of theories to make his point, including work by Claude Lévi-Strauss, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Michael Fried, Martin Heidegger, Jean-Luc Nancy, Immanuel Kant and G.W.F. Hegel. We believe that the work of further thinkers, such as Walter Benjamin, Georges Didi-Huberman, Gilles Deleuze or Jacques Rancière is also pertinent to the debate, as is the research on experimental science by, for example, Hans-Jörg Rheinberger or Steven Shapin, where matter is equally conceived as 'active'.

why and for whom it is relevant, how it investigates the issue, and what the outcomes are.

Usually, this is done in the form of a text that adheres to standards of academic writing. In order to understand how art may be perceived as academic writing, one needs to look at the purpose of academic writing rather than particular conventions of language. Focusing on writing for art students, for example, Apps and Mamchur (2009: 271f.) suggest four fundamental writing skills (discovering a subject, sensing an audience, searching for specifics, creating a design) that may equally be found in artistic practice and that allow for the 'thesis to be a complete *work of art*' (Apps and Mamchur 2009: 272). Needless to say, such statements are the result of a long-standing and ongoing transformation of the art academy that, according to Holert (2009), provides the historical trajectory for current debates on artistic research and that allowed for 'talk' to enter the studio.

If we look more specifically at academic writing, its key characteristics may be: complexity, formality, precision, objectivity, explicitness, accuracy, hedging and responsibility (Gillett 2010). But in one way or another those expectations of academia may equally be traced in art that exposes itself as research in practical terms. It needs to be said, however, that most of those characteristics are highly problematic and that the critical discourse in and around art is so advanced as to require a rethinking of the types of values that academia might expect. Most prominently, ideas of 'objectivity' have all but vanished and have been replaced by the creation of sometimes temporary communities and a striving for transpersonality. The same is true of the other points on the list: it is not that art does not wrestle with the values that those characteristics represent; it is just that simplified expectations – for example, when a study is assessed in terms of 'academic writing' – are not possible for artistic reasons.

One can see in the dominant two-component model of art and writing a first, primitive approximation of artistic research where thinking is spread across the two components while art and writing are not. Pragmatically, this has the advantage of leaving art largely undefined, while the written component delivers an academically credible case for this art to count as research. The conceptual disadvantage, however, is that practice can potentially remain unchallenged by what we may mean by 'research' as long as the written component can operate as a supplement that compensates for this. It is important to keep in mind, though, that all possible distributions of research across art and writing are perfectly acceptable; the point to be made here is only that some of those are less artistically owned than others and that academic frameworks may distort practice if they do not allow for a self-determined negotiation of writing. Moreover, it should also be said that the writing of academic texts may, in fact, be one element of an artistic practice. Artwork and text are non-correlated variables that can both be used for the exposition of practice as research.

This volume is organised in four sections: *Considering, Publishing, Practising* and *Placing*. Each section is introduced by a short editorial statement and comprises four chapters. In the first section, *Considering*, we aim to open the horizon to questions of exposition and ask what 'exposition' may mean to the different authors. The second section, *Publishing*, introduces the concrete backdrop of academic publishing and, in particular, the work carried out in the context of the Artistic Research Catalogue (ARC) project. Section three, *Practising*, adds more specific artistic approaches that show how 'exposition' may be approached in practice. The last section, *Placing*, looks at how, as a consequence, spaces for a public may be conceived.

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